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A REAVALUATION OF *SERPOPHAGA ARAGUAYAE* SNETHLAGE, 1928 (AVES: TYRANNIDAE)

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A REAVALUATION OF SERPOPHAGA ARAGUAYAE SNETHLAGE, 1928 (AVES: TYRANNIDAE)

José Maria Cardoso da Silva[1,2]

Abstract. The taxonomic status of **Serpophaga araguayae** Snethlage, 1928 (Aves: Tyrannidae) is reavaluated. It is concluded that the species is invalid and should be synonymized with **Myiopagis c. caniceps** (Swainson, 1837).

Key words: Birds, Tyrant Flycatchers, **Serpophaga araguayae**, **Myiopagis caniceps**, Taxonomy-birds

Resumo. O status taxonômico de **Serpophaga araguayae** é reavaliado. Conclui-se que a espécie é inválida e deve ser sinonimizada com **Myiopagis c. caniceps** (Swainson, 1837).

Palavras-chave: Aves, Tiranídeos, **Serpophaga araguayae**, **Myiopagis caniceps**, Taxonomia-aves

Serpophaga araguayae Snethlage, 1928 is known only from the type, a male collected at Furo da Pedra, Ilha do Bananal, Tocantins State (ex-Goiás), Brazil, on 6 Oct 1927, and deposited at the Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (MNRJ 12,848). The original description is detailed, reproducing all the information of

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M.G. 590.5 ex.3

the specimen label, with the exception of the notation that the bird, when collected, was part of "um bando de pássaros" ("a flock of birds"):

"Upper part of body light slaty-gray, lightly washed with greenish at the sides of the rump; top of head slightly darker and of a purer gray, the feathers indistinctly streaked with black; those in the center of the head have white bases, forming a semi-concealed occipital patch; sides of head and ear-coverts grayish, streaked with white; throat grayish white; breast and flanks light slaty-gray; center of belly and lower tail coverts white; thighs grayish, narrowly streaked with white; wing coverts dark brownish black, broadly margined with white forming two distinct bars; remiges blackish brown, primaries with narrow, and secondaries with broad white outer margins; rectrices brownish gray, those in the center rather washed with blackish and bordered on the basal part with light slaty gray.

"Measurements: wing 60.5 mm; tail 52 mm; bill 9 mm; tarsus 16 mm.

"Iris brown; feet (sic) dark gray; bill black; stomach contents insects.

"Habitat: forest of Bananal Island, Araguaia River.

...

"When I killed this bird I thought at first that it was **S. hypoleuca pallida** that I collected on the lower Tocantins in 1907, but later I realized that it belongs to an entirely different group. It appears to be related to **S. munda** of Berlepsch (from western Mato Grosso), from which it differs by larger size and by the gray breast, instead of white. Since I do not have material at hand to use for comparison, I provisionally treat the new form as a binomial."

Since the description of the type, there has been no additional information on the taxon.

I examined the type in February 1989 with the

objective of clarifying its systematic position. Two preliminary hypotheses regarding the infrageneric affinities of the taxon were evaluated (see below). I also compared the type with other species of elaenines (**sensu** Traylor 1977). As a consequence, I arrived at the conclusion that **Serpophaga araguayae** is an invalid species that should be synonymized with **Myiopagis c. caniceps** (Swainson, 1837).

Serpophaga munda Berlepsch, stated by Snethlage to be **S. araguayae**'s probable closest relative, is today considered (Traylor 1977) a subspecies of **S. subcristata** (Vieillot). In spite of similarities in plumage coloration with **S. subcristata munda, S. araguayae**, when compared with other members of the **subcristata** group, is distinctive in its measurements (Table 1), in its lack of white superciliary stripe, and in its relatively heavy bill.

Traylor (1977) considers **S. araguayae** close to **S. nigricans**, without citing an explicit basis for this conclusion. The latter species has generally gray plumage, with little or no white in the center of the belly. its measurements are also distinct from those of **S. araguayae** (Table 1).

Based on Snethlage's information, **S. araguayae** is a bird of gallery forest. The other species of **Serpophaga**, however, are either birds of open formations with scattered trees, or terrestrial riverine species (Traylor & Fitzpatrick 1982; Sick 1985; Hilty & Brown 1986). In addition to this ecological difference, **S. araguayae**'s deeper and stronger bill has no parallel in any other **Serpophaga** examined. These characteristics are discordant with the generic classification attributed to **S. araguayae**, and indicate that the taxon should be placed in another group of elaenines, the genus **Myiopagis**.

Within **Myiopagis**, there is a striking similarity between **S. araguayae** and **M. c. caniceps**, a bird commonly found in mixed species flocks in the forests

Table 1 - Measurements (mm) and standard deviations (in parentheses) of **Serpophaga s. subcristata, S. s. munda, S. nigricans. "S. araguayae"** and **Myiopagis c. caniceps.**

	wing (flat)	tail	bill[1]
S. s. subcristata			
10 ♂'s, 9 ♀'s	46.5(1.7)	48.7(2.9)	6.2(0.7)
S. s. munda			
2 ♂'s, 1 ♀, 2 ?	50.3(3.1)	52.0(3.8)	6.1(0.6)
S. nigricans			
9 ♂'s, 5 ♀'s, 3 ?	56.2(1.8)	51.8(2.2)	7.4(0.5)
"S. araguayae"[2]			
1 ♂	60.0	55.0	7.0
M. c. caniceps			
7 ♂'s, 2 ?	61.0(1.5)	56.9(1.8)	6.8(0.4)

[1] bill measurement from nostril to tip

[2] measurements of the type by the author

of central Brazil. The form of the bill, measurements (Table 1), and plumage coloration all support this conclusion. **M. c. caniceps** presents a great variation in plumage coloration (Hellmayr 1908). Females and young males have greenish backs, with the belly and central feathers of the top of the head yellow; the adult male, however, has a dark slate-gray back, with the belly and central feathers of the top of the head white, and breast whitish washed with light gray. Sub-adult males may present a wide spectrum of intermediate coloration phases between these two extremes. Within this framework, the single specimen of **S. araguayae** can be viewed as an individual of **M. c. caniceps** with almost fully adult plumage. The plumage of the back, with a mixture of greenish tones in

the dominant light slaty-gray, is the only reminiscence of the sub-adult plumage.

The general external morphological similarity between **Myiopagis** and **Serpophaga** has already provoked much confusion in the past (Traylor 1977), and apparently does not reflect any close phylogenetic association. In the most complete and recent study on the phylogeny of the Tyrannidae (Lanyon 1988), the two genera, in spite of both being included in the Elaeninae, are widely separated in the proposed cladogram.

With the invalidation of **S. araguayae**, the valley of the Araguaia River retains only a single avian endemism at the species level: **Cercomacra ferdinandi**.

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